

November 1, 2, 3: Oral Perspectives from the SW Wisconsin Landscape

Susan Gilchrist will speak in **Dodgeville, Mt Horeb & Mineral Point** about an oral history project based on interviews from people from SW Wisconsin. The presentation will include readings from her book and follow with discussion about the process of oral history, uses in community and applications to conservation.

What connects people to the land around them? Time spent there, the memories of how they spent time and people they've cared about, hopes and dreams they've had, the beauty or uniqueness of the place itself. The focus of this oral history was the connection to a place: the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area. The success of that project resulted in expansion from 10,000 acres to 573,000 acres that spreads from western Dane County into Iowa, Green & Lafayette Counties -and is now called the **South West Grassland and Stream Conservation Area (SWGSCA)**.

Oral history can serve many purposes. This oral history project came about because the SWGSCA partners were interested in a landscape scale ecological conservation in the **SW Wisconsin's Driftless Area**. In order to find out what people connected to the land in the area valued, how the landscape has changed, how people who are invested in the place want it to be in the future, Gilchrist conducted 29 personal interviews, including 40 people, in 2004. Thanks to a grant from the **Wisconsin Humanities Council**, the answers to the questions, intertwined with personal memories, have been written into a book that paints a broad picture of this landscape over time in the SWGSCA. This book itself will be presented to the public and to the interviewees during throughout these public meetings.

People remembered farm life and a time when cheese factories and one-room country schools punctuated the countryside. Some referred to prairie remnants and recent work to restore prairies. Many noted changes in wildlife sightings over their lifetimes. People talked about their desire to in keep the land rural in nature. A backdrop of beauty and the vision of breath-taking view of wide open vistas color all memories.

Ms. Gilchrist grew up on a farm; lived in WI for 30 year; has completed several oral history projects under the wing of the Science Services Section WDNR; is a veteran presenter at conferences for environmental educators/naturalists/historical interpreters/wildlife conservationists; performed professionally as a storyteller. Please do come hear her speak:

Friday, Nov 1, Dodgeville, 10am-noon Cobblestone Coffee House, 237 N Iowa St, (Hosted by Marklein Auto, DGV Public Library and WDNR)

Saturday, Nov 2, Mt Horeb, 10am-noon, Mt Horeb Public Library, 105 Perimeter (hosted by TNC, UW Extension/Dane County, WDNR)

Sunday, Nov 3, Mineral Point, 2-4 Gray Dog Deli 215 High St. (hosted by WDNR, Mineral Point Historical Society and Gray Dog Deli)

Contact Maureen Rowe, Coordinator of SWGSCA at 608-235-5997 or Maureen.rowe@wisconsin.gov for more information.